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SUBJECT: OONI OF IFE BACKS OBASANJO EXTENSION

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

11. (C) In a November meeting, Consul General visited the Ooni of Ife, the most prominent Yoruba traditional ruler and one of the most influential traditional rulers in the country. The Ooni is unabashedly pro-Obasanjo and his leanings were quite apparent in his reflections on current political outlook. On the economic front, the Ooni urged the USG to proactively broaden business interests in Nigeria beyond the energy sector. He suggested establishing a private sector blue chip committee to encourage greater U.S. investment in the country. The Ooni was particularly unhappy with China's inroads into Nigeria's economy, and warned that their growing influence was inimical to both Nigeria's and the U.S.'s long-term interest.

12. (C) The Ooni further predicted none of the big names currently floated as likely presidential successors -- Atiku, Babangida, and Buhari -- would prevail. He thought the next president would emerge from the relatively small stable of Nigerians who have shown themselves to be genuine advocates and practitioners of reform.

13. (C) The Ooni's most intriguing insight was that President Obasanjo was energetically pursuing a constitutional amendment to extend his current term by two years. Two additional years would be sufficient time for the President's reforms to take root and for Obasanjo to groom a compatible successor. Then Obasanjo could leave office secure in the knowledge that his work would not be undone, the Ooni asserted.

14. (C) Comment: The Ooni is influential in the Southwest and he is a close ally and advisor to President Obasanjo. While the details of the proposed presidential extension may differ, the Ooni joins a growing list of interlocutors who state that Obasanjo will attempt to remain in office beyond 2007 if the price for the extension is not too high. End comment.
BROWNE